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THE TEMPTATION IN *PARADISE REGAINED*

The architectonic power of Milton has frequently been praised, and unquestionably it has borne a great part in bringing him enduring fame; from *Comus* to *Samson Agonistes* his poems are remarkable for their excellence of structure. The perfection of their plots is the result not of intuitive genius alone, but of perception and skill painstakingly developed through a long series of years. The outlines for dramas given in the Cambridge Manuscript indicate the process by which Milton trained himself to construct plots that can be summarized in a few words, and that, notwithstanding the great mass of their details, are easily followed. In the smaller as well as in the larger things of structure Milton was a conscious artist, and may be fittingly praised as a master. How clearly marked off are the various parts of *Paradise Lost*! One need not have the least doubt as to the exact point of division between the various sections within a book; the minor articulations are indicated by words of transition, and the larger divisions are usually separated by explanatory or reflective interludes. A glance at the paragraphing of any of Milton's poems, in the editions printed during his lifetime, reveals his sense for the details of structure, making an impression that is deepened by the careful fitting of the verses to the divisions of thought, so that with every paragraph a new rythmical group begins. A similar impression follows a careful reading of the Arguments prefixed to the books of *Paradise Lost*, for they make clear the larger and smaller divisions of each book; one can readily believe that the Argument, not 'at first intended,' but procured by the printer in response to popular demand, was not prepared by Milton for the occasion, but is the outline he had followed in composing his work. No poet could have made it easier to follow his thought than Milton has done by indicating the points where one idea gives way to the next, and in few poets are the transitions less safely disregarded, for an accurate discernment of them is necessary for thoroughly appreciative reading.

A second feature not to be disregarded by one who would read Milton with understanding is his compressed diction. A great poet never yields his full meaning, and never reveals his full beauty, to a reader who at intervals allows his attention to flag; in a production by an artist of high rank there is a reason assignable for every

word. Milton's works must be read with especial care, for he is thoughtful and interpretative above most who can be called narrative poets, and sometimes gives important ideas briefly, and once for all; to miss a sentence may be like missing a link in an argument. A third characteristic of Milton is his respect for the exact details, and even the wording, of the Bible. Perhaps it was possible for him to avoid changes in the facts of Scripture because his surpassing imaginative powers enabled him to find situations into which they could be harmoniously fitted. Undoubtedly the poet felt that he could count on the familiarity of his readers with the Bible to assist him in making clear to their understandings plots taken from it, and feared that if he essentially modified Biblical stories the same familiarity would be a source of confusion to those well acquainted with the Scriptures. But beyond and above all, Milton—like the Greek dramatists with their myths—did not feel free to make changes in the narratives of the inspired writers; the all important historical records of the New Testament especially were not to be altered.

A grasp of these three principles, that the structure of a poem of Milton's must be regarded, that proper understanding of a considerable portion may depend on a single line, or even a single word, and that Milton is unlikely to modify a Biblical story, is especially necessary to a correct estimate of *Paradise Regained*, and serious misinterpretation has resulted from their neglect. By applying them to a few passages I hope to aid in the interpretation of this poem, that *Paradise Regained* may receive more generally such appreciation as it won from Wordsworth, and Coleridge, and DeQuincey. They believed it the most nearly perfect of Milton's works, and surely it is a masterpiece of art, offering wondrous revelations to the student of literature, and furnishing never-ending profit and delight to any whose affections are set upon the highest and noblest poetry.

When Milton had selected the Temptation in the Wilderness as the subject for *Paradise Regained*, much yet remained to do. The Synoptists give three accounts: Matthew and Luke tell it at length, but in different order, and Mark relates it briefly, though with some additions. Milton selected the order of the Third Evangelist. Here, then, was the outline of the poem, thirteen verses in the fourth chapter of Luke's Gospel. The poet need not construct plans like those in the Cambridge Manuscript; the outline of his

plot was completed when he had added but a little to the original story, for it was already as excellent a summary of a projected longer account as could be desired.

From these thirteen verses Milton has developed a poem of more than two thousand lines, into which he has freely poured the riches of his mind. His careful study of the Bible and of many commentaries<sup>1</sup> on it, his wide reading in history and the classics and other fields, and the results of his life of contemplation, all contribute their share. The mere expansion of the Evangelist's narrative is a great feat of the imagination. It may be compared with Shakespeare's expansion of his materials in order to produce *Othello* or *King Lear*, or with Tennyson's achievement when, reading Malory, he wrote the *Idylls of the King*. Of all Milton's varied sources, poetical and otherwise, commentaries on the Gospels were probably the most helpful. But commentators are not given to developing the story of the temptation in Miltonic fashion, however many scattered hints they may furnish. Origen, for example, following the suggestion of Mark and Luke that Christ was tempted during the whole period of forty days, says that just as the world would not be able to contain the books if all the deeds of Christ should be recorded, so the world would not be able to endure it if all the temptations were related.<sup>2</sup> In like manner Calvin says that there were many temptations, of which only the most valuable and important are reported.<sup>3</sup> Such suggestions emphasize Milton's method; he has expanded the Biblical story, not by adding incidents, but by developing those already given. So far as the temptations are concerned, Milton follows the narrative of Luke's Gospel without alteration, and without adding

<sup>1</sup> As a scholarly student of the Bible, Milton was familiar with the best commentaries. The earliest life of the poet reports that 'besides his ordinary lectures out of the Bible and the best commentaries on the week day, that was his sole subject on Sundays' (*Of Education*, etc., by John Milton, ed. Laura E. Lockwood, Riverside Literature Series, p. xxxvi). Many of his prose writings mention theologians and commentators he was especially familiar with (Calvin, Bucer, Paraeus, etc.); especially the *Treatise on Christian Doctrine* refers to them, as in Book 2, Chapter 7. In Milton's time even more than to-day a theologian was of necessity a close student of the Bible, and hence a student and writer of commentaries; for theology was much more than at present a matter of the subtle interpretation of proof-texts.

<sup>2</sup> In *Lucam*, Hom. 29.

<sup>3</sup> *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, trans. Pringle, Edinburgh 1845, p. 211, on Matt. 4. 1.

anything that is not directly evolved from it. If *Paradise Regained* is to be rightly appreciated, its Biblical structure must not be forgotten.

Upon the close of the introductory part of the work, including the account of the Satanic council in mid-air, and of the Almighty's words in Heaven, Christ leaves Bethabara, the place of baptism, and enters the desert. Forty days are passed in solitude. Then the Tempter appears, in the form of an aged man. After a brief colloquy, he proposes the first temptation, in words altered from those of Matthew only as the meter makes necessary:

But if thou be the Son of God, Command  
That out of these hard stones be made thee bread (1. 342-3).

Jesus replies with the words that according to Scripture repelled this attack. Here ends the first trial. Satan and Christ continue their dialogue, the Fiend attempting to justify himself, and the Savior unveiling his enemy's hypocrisy. The discourse ended, Satan departs.

The context makes it obvious that the first temptation is not, as some have said, a mere attempt to persuade a hungry man to take food. It is interpreted in the words of Christ to the Tempter:

Why dost thou then suggest to me distrust (1. 355)?

Satan is attempting to influence Christ to doubt his divine Sonship. The whole dialogue emphasizes distrust; Satan asserts that a solitary wayfarer has never yet escaped alive from the desert, and that only by miracle can Jesus reach safety. In making the temptation one not of hunger but of lack of faith, Milton is in harmony with many interpreters of the Bible. The words of Calvin are especially significant:

It is absurd to suppose that it arises from the intemperance of gluttony, when a hungry person desires food to satisfy nature. What luxury will they fancy themselves to have discovered in the use of bread, that one who satisfies himself, as we say, with dry bread, must be reckoned an epicure? But not to waste more words on that point, Christ's answer alone is sufficient to show that the design of Satan was altogether different. The Son of God was not such an unskillful or inexperienced antagonist, as not to know how he might ward off the strokes of his adversary, or idly to present his shield on the left hand when he was attacked on the right. If Satan had endeavored to allure him by the enticements of gluttony, he had at hand passages of Scripture fitted to repel him. But he proposes nothing of this sort. He quotes the statement that men do not live by bread alone, but by the secret blessing of God. Hence we conclude that Satan made a direct attack on the faith of Christ, in the hope that, after destroying his faith, he would drive Christ to unlawful and wicked

methods of procuring food. And certainly he presses us very hard, when he attempts to make us distrust God, and consult our own advantage in a way not authorized by His word. The meaning of the words, therefore, is: 'When you see that you are forsaken by God, you are driven by necessity to attend to yourself. Provide then for yourself the food, with which God does not supply you.' Now, though he holds out the divine power of Christ to turn the stones into loaves, yet the single object which he has in view is to persuade Christ to depart from the word of God, and to follow the dictates of infidelity. Christ's reply, therefore, is appropriate: 'Man shall not live by bread alone. You advise me to contrive some remedy, for obtaining relief in a different manner from what God permits. This would be to distrust God; and I have no reason to expect that he will support me in a different manner from what he has promised in his word. You, Satan, represent his favor as confined to bread: but Himself declares that, though every kind of food were wanting, his blessing alone is sufficient for our nourishment.'<sup>4</sup>

After the departure of Satan at the end of the first temptation, the scene changes, showing first the disciples and the Virgin Mary, next, a second council of Satan and his followers. The place of action is then once more the desert, where the Son of God is meditating on his hunger. Night comes on, and he passes it beneath the trees. With the new day the Tempter reappears. This day is given up to the extended series of tests that makes up the second temptation, which is to take as gifts from Satan the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. This is by far the longest of the temptations, and occupies much of the poem, extending from Book 2, line 298 to Book 4, line 397.

The first part of it is the magnificent banquet scene—perhaps the most misunderstood event in the poem. Apparently all writers on the subject, from the Rev. Dr. Plummer,<sup>5</sup> scholarly author of learned commentaries on the Gospels, to Professor William Vaughan Moody,<sup>6</sup> one of the less appreciative of Milton's editors, have explained the banquet as part of the first temptation, apparently for the insignificant reason that both deal with food. Milton gives little excuse for such an opinion. As has been noted, he has already given the first in the language of the Bible, and elucidated it. Moreover, he separates it from the banquet scene by a considerable interlude,<sup>7</sup> which includes a night intervening be-

<sup>4</sup> *L.c.*, pp. 213-14, Matt. 4.3-4.

<sup>5</sup> *Commentary on Matthew*, p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> *The Cambridge Milton*, Boston 1899, pp. 249ff.

<sup>7</sup> Possibly the suggestion of a space of time between the temptations comes from Calvin, who writes: It is possible that the second temptation did not

tween the first and the second temptation, just as one intervenes between the second and the third. Not only does he clearly mark off the three by assigning each to a separate day and a separate visit of Satan, but he carefully knits together the parts of the long second temptation, during the whole of which Satan never leaves the scene, or remits his endeavors. The transitions leading from one subdivision to the next are carefully worked out, that between the tender of the banquet, which is the first part, and the offer of wealth, the second part, being especially clear. After the table and its pompous delicacies vanish,

Only the importune Tempter still remain'd,  
And with these words his temptation pursu'd (2. 404-5).

Milton thinks of direct continuance of the action in hand rather than of change to another. He uses the same verb, *pursue*, at the transition between two later parts of this same temptation. Finding Christ unshaken by the vision of the Parthian Empire, Satan

Yet gives not o're though desperate of success,  
And his vain importunity pursues (4. 23-4),

by showing the splendors of Rome. Here the poet certainly means to indicate persistence in the same attempt.

The banquet is obviously one of the glories of the world offered by Satan to Christ as gifts. In the first temptation he endeavors to lead Christ to perform a rash action. In the second the emphasis, especially in Luke, is on Satan's desire to give him gifts; accordingly, throughout his relation of it Milton has put considerable stress on the thought. It appears most prominently when Satan demands that Christ fall down and worship him, but is not much less striking in connection with the proffer of the feast. Before the table appears, Satan asks:

Tell me if Food were now before thee set,  
Would'st thou not eat? Thereafter as I like  
The giver, answer'd Jesus (2. 320-22).

And he concludes his refusal:

I count thy specious gifts no gifts but guiles (2. 391).

The banquet is in keeping with the other glorious offerings of the Tempter. Milton uses no small pains to portray

A Table richly spread, in regal mode (2. 340),

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follow the first, nor the third the second, in immediate succession, but that some interval of time elapsed. This is even more probable (*l.c.*, p. 217, Matt. 4.5).

and not a few writers have commented on the splendor of the show. Professor Moody says that 'Milton exhausts the resources of his orchestration. He pictures forth a feast to tempt a prince in the *Arabian Nights*.' The critic is endeavoring to make clear that the banquet, which he identifies with the first temptation, is not in keeping with it. He succeeds admirably in his purpose, but just in proportion as he succeeds, he unconsciously praises the art of Milton, when he thinks to blame. The more splendid the feast, the less reason there is to associate it with the simple first temptation, and the more suitably it takes its place in the second, as one of the glories of the kingdoms of the world.

As the second temptation proceeds, its parts continuously gain in attractiveness. The splendid banquet, the first and simplest of worldly glories, is followed by the offer of treasures. Next is the incitement to seek fame, succeeded by the offer of the throne of David, to be obtained with the assistance of the powerful Parthian armies. After this is the proffer of the full might of Rome, and the climax reaches its summit in the magnificent vision of Athens, and the account of her intellectual preëminence. Satan characterizes the series to his followers as presenting objects that

have more shew  
Of worth, of honour, glory, and popular praise; . . .  
Or that which only seems to satisfy  
Lawful desires of Nature, not beyond (2. 226-30).

It is not that the things themselves are evil, but to accept them would be to abandon the seeming weakness of spiritual strength for the seeming strength of fleshly weakness. Satan endeavors to make Christ believe himself so feeble in his lack of physical and worldly power that he will endeavor to supply his needs at the expense of his spirit. In the things of the flesh Christ is weak; the Devil here speaks the truth, for, as Grotius comments on Luke 4.6, he mixes the false with the true, as the Sophists were accustomed to do. The allurements of Satan all depend on this apparent lack of strength. Christ is in the desert, solitary and powerless, is the burden of the Tempter's speeches. He is hungry; let him supply his bodily needs with the offered feast. He is poor; Satan can give him great riches. He is unknown; let him come from the desert to secure glory throughout the world. He is without the power needed to establish himself on the throne of David; Satan will put at his disposal to accomplish his patri-

otic mission the force of the Parthians. With less than the greatest might, he is insecure; the Roman Empire is in Satan's gift. Unskilled in the learning of the world, let Christ render himself a king complete, able to convince all opponents, by mastering Greek learning. His weakness is to be made strong by the gifts of Satan, though with characteristic skill in the perception of delicate fitness, Milton does not represent the Tempter as offering to supply Christ with glory—that is to result only from the display of Our Lord's own powers—nor does the Adversary claim dominion over the intellectual riches of Athens. However useless it may be to the Son of God, Greek learning, one should observe, is not in the power of the Devil to bestow. From the banquet to the Roman Empire, Christ sees that the proffers of Satan are fallacious, for he is never more the Adversary, never more to be feared, than when bringing gifts. Moreover, the offered bounty is not his to bestow; only in appearance is he the ruler of the world, for Christ does not fail to know that the earth is the Lord's, that Satan is pretending to assign what belongs of a truth to the Father. The gifts tendered are in themselves good. Before the Son came to full understanding of his mission

victorious deeds  
 Flam'd in his heart, heroic acts, one while  
 To rescue Israel from the Roman yoke,  
 Thence to subdue and quell o're all the earth  
 Brute violence and proud Tyrannick pow'r  
 Till truth were freed, and equity restor'd (l. 215-20).

But when he fully understood his divine Sonship, he turned to spiritual means. Food, political power, the learning of Greece, all are necessary to a mortal man who must do his work in human fashion, but to the First-begotten, taught directly of God, who is the source of all wisdom and power, they are useless.

It is to be noted that much as he expands the second temptation of Luke, Milton adheres to the letter of the Biblical account. The splendid banquet at the beginning, and the learning of Greece at the end, may well be included among the kingdoms of the world. Satan offers the first with the words:

Hast thou not right to all Created things,  
 Owe not all Creatures by just right to thee  
 Duty and Service, not to stay till bid,  
 But tender all their power? . . .  
 Nature . . . hath purvey'd

From all the Elements her choicest store  
To treat thee as beseems, and as her Lord  
With honour (2. 324-36).

Of the disguised devils who assist at the banquet he says:

All these are Spirits of Air, and Woods, and Springs,  
Thy gentle Ministers, who come to pay  
Thee homage, and acknowledge thee thir Lord (2. 374-7).

In presenting the knowledge of the world, Satan offers the exhortation:

Be famous then  
By wisdom; as thy Empire must extend,  
So let extend thy mind o're all the world,  
In knowledge, all things in it comprehend (4. 221-24).

Yet, though food and learning are of the empires of the world, the scriptural words of the second temptation follow the offer of what are in no figurative sense worldly kingdoms; directly after the vision of the Roman and Parthian realms, and before that of Athenian learning, Satan proposes the impious condition, recorded in the Scriptures, that Jesus fall down and worship him, to be answered in the words of the Evangelist:

It is written  
. . . Thou shalt worship  
The Lord thy God, and only him shalt serve (4. 175-77).

The second attempt fully concluded, Satan, who through it all has not left the side of Christ, departs, or rather feigns to depart. Night follows, separating the second encounter from the third, just as night divides the first from the second. On the morning of the third, and last day, Satan reappears for the third temptation, which is that Christ shall cast himself from the pinnacle of the temple. When compared with his elaborate account of the second struggle, Milton's treatment of the third, like that of the first, is brief.

The poet does not interpret it to show the sort of sin that Christ is tempted to commit, but leaves the reader to form his own opinion with no more assistance than is to be obtained from the Biblical account. It is used to show the overwhelming triumph of the Son of God, who conquers Satan, and forces him to realize that he has matched himself with the same divine being who ages before had driven him headlong into the abyss of Chaos. On the part of Satan, the last temptation is a final test of identity; he hopes to discover who the opponent is on whom in repeated assaults he

has spent all his wiles. Up to the last, Satan is not convinced that the man he is attacking,

though in his face

The glimpses of his Fathers glory shine (1. 92-3),

is the same of whom he says to his crew:

His first-begot we know, and sore have felt,

When his fierce thunder drove us to the deep (1. 89-90).

Thus far Satan has been resisted, as he says, by one

firm

To the utmost of meer man both wise and good,

Not more (4. 534-36).

He has felt only human power to resist his wiles, and cannot perceive that perfect humanity is nothing less than divinity. Since his own nature is but the spirit of the world, Satan cannot realize that the simple refusal of Christ to put himself to the test is the most convincing of all proofs of divinity, and that seeking not his own, but his who sent him, Christ has thereby witnessed whence he is. Satan is not in the habit of associating perfection with humanity, nor can he understand that divinity may be simple. When the Son of God, encompassed with the splendors of his Father's glory, and riding in the chariot of the cherubim, passed over the necks of the fallen host of rebellious angels, Satan could understand him. Glory and the outward appearance of power were well known to the Adversary, but as Gregory the Great suggests, the devil in his pride doubted the divinity of the *humble* Christ.<sup>8</sup> 'Swollen with rage' at a resistance that both foils his purpose of overthrowing his victim, and yet gives him no certain knowledge with whom he contends, Satan, all his darts of craft now spent, seizes Christ, and placing him on the highest pinnacle of the Temple, adds 'in scorn':

There stand, if thou wilt stand; to stand upright

Will ask thee skill; I to thy Fathers house

Have brought thee, and highest plac't, highest is best,

Now shew thy Progeny; if not to stand,

Cast thyself down; safely if Son of God (4. 551-55).

Jesus, answering in the words of Scripture,

it is written

Tempt not the Lord thy God,

stood upright;

<sup>8</sup> *Moralia*, 2. 24-25.

But Satan smitten with amazement fell . . .  
And to his crew, that sat consulting, brought  
Joyless triumphals of his hop't success,  
Ruin, and desperation, and dismay (4. 562-79).

It has been observed that in the first two temptations Milton refrains from any actual alteration of the gospel account, however much he may expand it. The present writer believes that the third is treated in the same way, but former writers have thought otherwise. Jerram, one of the best commentators on *Paradise Regained*, accepts Dunster's interpretation of the passage: Satan, he says, 'bids Christ prove that he is the Son of God either by standing or by safely casting himself down.' The words of Scripture are merely: If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down. A scrutiny of Milton's lines furnishes the solution of the problem. Taken by itself the speech of Satan does seem to give the alternative:

There stand, if thou wilt stand; . . .  
if not to stand,

Cast thyself down.

And, undoubtedly, Milton thought of the pinnacle as offering no footing, a place where one could stand only by miracle. The lines immediately preceding Satan's speech make it a spire:<sup>9</sup>

the glorious Temple rear'd  
Her pile, . . . top't with golden Spires:  
There on the highest Pinnacle he set  
The Son of God (4. 546-59).

But is it not possible that Milton, making no essential change in the narrative of Luke, has by expansion given it a subtle turn that greatly increases the effect of the passage? Satan, his real uncertainty augmented by his rage and chagrin, declares, blinded by anger, that Christ is no more the Son of God than other men. In his passion he is confident that his victim, hitherto having given no sign of miraculous power, will be unable to keep his footing on the dizzy height where he is suddenly placed. His words to Christ do not mean: 'Prove your power by standing on this airy height, or else by casting yourself safely down.' If they do, Christ, by standing still, accepts one of the alternatives offered by Satan—an incredible thing for him to do. It is impossible to think that he would do what Satan asked; or that he would thus have furnished the Tempter the slightest evidence that he

<sup>9</sup> Likewise in Milton's account of Rome there is the anachronism of 'glittering spires' (*P. R.* 4. 54) on the palace of the Roman Emperor.

was the Son of God, much less the crushing proof that did come. In the very act of its fulfilment the sign would have invalidated itself. Milton cannot, at the acme of his poem, have represented Christ as tamely performing one of the two acts put forward by Satan as satisfactory tests. By saying that the Tempter's words (There stand, if thou wilt stand, etc.) are added '*in scorn*,' Milton indicates that they mean: 'Here it is impossible for you to stand; you must either cast yourself down or fall, thus proving to me, by the outcome, whether you are under the protection of the Father or not.' The same belief of Satan that Christ, if he does not cast himself down, will fall headlong, appears in the line telling that Satan, when Christ stood firm,

Fell whence he stood to see his Victor fall (4. 570).

The Fiend believes that he has proposed a test from which there is no escape, and which will unfailingly reveal to him what he has so long been seeking to learn. But, losing his subtlety in his consuming rage, he has overlooked one possibility. Christ rejects the proposal to throw himself down, and shows his calm dignity and miraculous power by doing what the Devil had believed impossible. He smites Satan with amazement by standing firm in his 'uneasy station.' An unimagined miracle convinces the Tempter that he is dealing with the dreaded Only-begotten Son of God; and his amazement is caused by the astounding manner of the sudden revelation, as well as by the intelligence itself. In this temptation, as before, the poet adheres to the spirit and letter of the Evangelist.

Milton did not feel free to modify the inspired narrative he had selected as the most fit medium for the verities he wished to utter. The unfolding of the Gospels must have been one of his desires: part of his work as a poet was to interpret the sacred volume containing the truth necessary to salvation. As he gave abstract expression to his Christian faith in the devoutly labored *Treatise on Christian Doctrine*, which he esteemed his 'best and richest possession,' so he presented it in poetry in a 'more simple, sensuous, and passionate' form. He gladly bent his genius to follow literally the narratives of the Evangelists, trusting that he might be able to bring out of them poetic truth; for Milton saw more than the truth of fact in the parts of the Bible that he made the subject of imaginative treatment. He perceived that they were concrete representations of mighty and ever living thoughts and feelings

of human life. The sacred narrative of the struggle and victory of Jesus Christ was not merely to be retold; nor was it enough for the poet to surround it with rich comment, the product of long reflection and meditative perusal of the best authors. It was to him a mighty action, representative of mortal life, fit for the noblest and highest sort of poetry, and carrying a great imaginative message to the hearts of men. It revealed not merely truth of Biblical fact, but permanent truth of human and divine nature. Milton carried the Scriptural story beyond the limits of history or of theology, making it the great epic pattern of moral and spiritual courage and victory.

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